

## CHAPTER 1

# Lacan's Subversion of the Subject

Lacan often insists that his use of the term *subject* goes against the traditional understanding of the subject: he is rather well known, in fact, for proclaiming a “subversion of the subject” (Lacan 1966, 793–827/Lacan 2002, 281–312). But Lacan does not only subvert the subject. As Alain Badiou has pointed out, Lacan was one of the few in his time to have gone beyond calling for a subversion of the (classical) subject: Lacan also rethought the subject (Badian 1989, 24–25). Two influential works on Lacan—Borch-Jacobsen’s (1991) *Lacan: The Absolute Master* and Lacoue-Labarthe’s and Nancy’s (1992) *The Title of the Letter*—argue that Lacan’s rethinking of the subject corrupted his subversion, such that the Lacanian subject is a traditional subject in a thin disguise. In particular, they claim that Lacan’s subject, despite its new disguise, is still a subject who represents, who creates meanings, and seeks above all to represent itself. In order to introduce the issues and concepts involved in Lacan’s theory of the subject, I will focus on a claim shared by Borch-Jacobsen and Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy: that Lacan’s subject is language *at work*. The subject, according to this erroneous reading, is identical to language understood as the process of creating meanings and representations.

In his description of Lacan’s project, Borch-Jacobsen highlights an oddity intrinsic to it: Lacan tried to introduce the subject into a structuralist theory of language. Structuralist approaches to anything generally set the issue of subjectivity aside. Borch-Jacobsen argues that the

major problem with Lacan's supposed subversion of the subject results from this forced inclusion or reintroduction of the subject into a structuralist understanding of language:

The hypothesis here [...] is that the subject's reintroduction corresponds to the linguistic model's massive overdetermination by the philosophical problematic of the subject of representation, a problematic Cartesian in origin, of which Lacan provides an ultramodern version inspired by Kojève's commentary on Hegel. (1991, 187)

According to Borch-Jacobsen, by introducing the subject into a structuralist theory of language Lacan situates both the subject and language within the problematic of representation. Borch-Jacobsen explains what he means by "the subject of representation" as follows: it involves "a subject's intentionally *ex*-pressing himself within 'language,' manifesting himself in exteriority by passing through the medium of the other—in short [...] performing an autorepresentation" (1991, 188). Borch-Jacobsen does say that Lacan provides us with an "ultramodern" version of this subject of representation. That is, Lacan's subject is not a simple repetition of the Cartesian subject. But Lacan's subject is still "Cartesian in origin," and this mitigates its claim to subversion (1991, 187).

By calling Lacan's subject an "ultramodern" version of the Cartesian cogito, Borch-Jacobsen acknowledges that Lacan alters the subject as it had traditionally been understood. To its credit, Borch-Jacobsen finds that "the Lacanian cogito is from the very start a linguistic, social, and intersubjective cogito, a cogito in the first person plural" (1991, 189). Language, sociality, and intersubjectivity are attributes that are indeed difficult to attach to the Cartesian cogito. By making these attributes essential to the cogito, Borch-Jacobsen wants to say that Lacan upgraded the cogito, bringing it in line with contemporary concerns, while leaving the basic "problematic" of the cogito intact. Lacan's modernizations change nothing, then, about the subject's "structure as cogito, understood as the structure of the subject of representation. The subject of speech, for the Hegelian who was the young Lacan, continues to speak *himself* in the other to whom he speaks" (1991, 189). So, this Lacanian subject who speaks itself and represents itself in language is

precisely what makes the otherwise sense-less machine of the signifier run, what makes the *langue* of the linguists speak—or, if you will, it is that "prodigious energy"—the negative—

which makes langue signify, makes it “produce” meaning. And this meaning is once again, now and forever, the “subject = 0” who speaks himself in everything. (1991, 195)

According to Borch-Jacobsen, Lacan's view is that a meaningless system of signifiers is only able to produce meanings because of the work of a subject. Lacan may have modified and upgraded the Cartesian cogito by making it more “social, linguistic, and intersubjective,” but since the subject is still seen as some kind of power that creates meanings in language, a power that fills empty signifiers with content, the representational model of subjectivity is still operative in Lacan's theory.

This does not jibe with what Lacan thought his theory of the subject was doing, and strictly speaking, signifiers, not subjects, are what produce meanings. A subject who produces meanings would usually be thought of as a subject who is somehow external to language: a subject with intentions, desires, and meanings who must use signifiers to express them. But by claiming that Lacan's subject remains classical, Borch-Jacobsen does not mean that the subject is external to language in this way. The Lacanian subject, according to Borch-Jacobsen, is engulfed in language. So how is one to think of a subject of representation who is not external to the medium in which it is represented? Borch-Jacobsen's solution is to claim that for Lacan, subject and language are actually the same thing. Lacan's introduction of the subject into a structuralist theory of language, according to Borch-Jacobsen, bestows upon language all the powers of the subject:

This complete reabsorption of the subject into the “discourse of the Other” that represents him is what has made inattentive readers think that Lacan had finished once and for all with the subject of the cogito. But that simply is not true, as Lacan himself very well knew. To say that the subject *is* language is also to say that language *is* the subject “himself”—or, if you will, that the two are the *same*. (1991, 195, emphasis in original)

The claim that for Lacan “the subject *is* language” is erroneous, yet I would like to point out why this reading is an elegant solution to a genuine theoretical problem. If “the subject *is* language,” if the two are the same, then one does not have to say that the subject is external to language (thus the subject remains profoundly linguistic). Yet the subject may still be something that expresses and represents itself; it can still be seen as the agent behind the significations produced by language, only it would be something like an unconscious agent.

In fact, if language and the subject are identical, then any use of language may be seen as a self-expression and self-representation, as Borch-Jacobsen goes on to argue: “In reality, language in Lacan speaks only of the subject. [...] Thus this language remains autoenunciative through and through” (1991, 195). However, Borch-Jacobsen’s contention is erroneous. He gives no passage in support of his claim that the subject is the same as language, and I have not found one in Lacan’s work either—quite the opposite, as we shall see. I believe Borch-Jacobsen is led to make this assertion because he wishes to do justice to the idea that the subject is not external to language in Lacanian theory. A persistent theme in Lacan’s discussions of the subject is the view that the subject is an effect of signifiers, and so Borch-Jacobsen is right to wonder whether the subject is anything other than language. Borch-Jacobsen does not consider, however, that thinking of the subject as an effect does not have to mean that the subject is somehow immanent in, rather than external to, language. I will be arguing that Lacan’s subject is an effect of language, but an effect that remains external to, and not reducible to, language. This is because the subject is not simply an effect of signifiers but an effect of signifiers themselves interacting with something nonlinguistic: sexuality.

In their widely read and influential work *The Title of the Letter*, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy arrive at roughly the same interpretation of the Lacanian subject as Borch-Jacobsen. They acknowledge that the Lacanian subject is not a “master of meaning,” but they still claim that “the locus of the Lacanian signifier is nevertheless the subject” (1992, 65). If signifiers are located in a subject, then signifiers still somehow depend upon a subject for their meaning. As is the case with Borch-Jacobsen’s critique of Lacan, it is the relation of the subject to language that maintains what Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy call the “classical” notion of the subject in Lacan’s work, and the classical subject was a subject who produced meaning (1992, 63).

Where Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy say “classical,” Borch-Jacobsen says “subject of representation,” but the point is the same. Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy argue that if signifiers are located “in” a subject, then the subject is something that creates meanings. Borch-Jacobsen argues that if the subject is identical to language, then the subject not only creates meanings but also represents itself whenever it speaks. In both cases, language is portrayed as a medium that represents and expresses (more or less) what a subject wants to represent and express. Also, both interpretations understand the subject to be something that makes language work. Lacan’s subject is indeed deeply entangled with language, but according to these readings the subject is

still the master of language, even if it is not the “master of meaning”: it still makes language work, even if it does not have full control over what language produces. Here is how Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy present their conclusion about Lacan's subject:

The subject is defined as “what the signifier represents,” which should be understood the following way: if the subject is the possibility of speech, and if this speech is actualized as a signifying chain, then the relation of a signifier to another signifier, or that which a signifier “represents,” as Lacan says, for another signifier—namely, *the very structure of the chain—is what must be named “subject.”* (1992, 69, emphasis added)

The subject is identified with the structure of the signifying chain. Roughly put, with language.

#### CRITIQUE OF THE CRITIQUES

What Borch-Jacobsen and Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy all seem to agree on is that it is the particular way in which Lacan construes the relationship between the subject and language that makes his theory of the subject traditional, despite its innovation in introducing “social, linguistic, and intersubjective” aspects into the cogito. A point that seems to work in their favor is the definition Lacan often gave of “the signifier,” a definition that puts the subject and language in a manifestly representational relationship to each other. What is a signifier? According to Lacan, in a definition repeated often in his work, “a signifier is what represents the subject to another signifier” (Lacan 1966, 819/Lacan 2002, 304). In this definition, the relation of the subject to language is put in terms of representation, and Lacan is saying explicitly that signifiers represent a subject. This definition understandably plays an important role in Borch-Jacobsen's interpretation of Lacan's theory of the subject, where it is used to show that Lacan, despite holding that “the subject is subjected to the signifier,” also holds that “the signifier represents nothing but the subject, by means of which it [the signifier] is reinvested with that function of *representation* that Lacan so stringently denies elsewhere” (1991, 186, emphasis in original). Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy also use this definition in their critique of Lacan: in fact, in the passage I cited earlier, they refer to it when making their point that the subject is equivalent to language (1992, 69).

I will respond in two ways to the claim that Lacan's subject is a subject of representation and self-expression: first, by taking a closer look at Lacan's definition of the signifier, and second, by looking at some passages in which Lacan expands upon the relation of the subject to language.

While the definition of the signifier expresses the relation between the subject and the signifier in terms of representation, it is not clear that the definition is making the subject into a subject of representation, since it does not at all imply that the subject is something that uses signifiers to represent or express itself. It merely says that a subject is something that gets represented by a signifier. In this respect, a subject might be no different from anything else that gets represented or said in language. True, the definition is privileging the subject in relation to signifiers. By definition, it is a *subject* that one signifier represents to another signifier, and one is not dealing with a signifier if it does not represent a subject. But still, the definition is not saying that there is a subject who aims to represent itself, or that it is a subject who accomplishes a self-representation through signifiers. The definition supports the view that the subject is a product of the interaction of signifiers just as much as it supports the view that the subject is engaged in auto-representation.

Further justification for this take on the matter can be found on the basis of what else Lacan says about the subject. Several passages make it quite clear that Lacan does not wish to equate the subject with language. At one point, Lacan characterizes the subject as something that has a "one foot in, one foot out articulation in the field of the Other" (XVI, 5/7/69). If "the Other" is, more or less, the field of language, then it is difficult to see how the subject could be identical to language if the subject has one foot in and one foot out of it.<sup>1</sup> The subject is in part "in" the Other but is also not in the Other: in other words, the subject has an important relation to language, but it is also external to language in some way.

In another passage, Lacan writes that "the subject that it [the signifier] represents is not univocal. It is represented, undoubtedly, but it is also not represented. [...] Something remains hidden in relation to this very signifier" (XVII, 101). Lacan is elaborating on the definition of the signifier here, indicating that the definition itself (which was, after all, supposed to be only a definition of "the signifier") does not give an adequate picture of the subject. The subject is not only represented by a signifier: a part of it is also not represented. Again, the suggestion is that the subject is not identical to language.

The final passage I will consider here is one of the clearest I have found concerning the relation of the subject to language in Lacan's

work. In it, Lacan explicitly rejects the view that the subject is equivalent to language, while also bringing into his theory of the subject an element whose importance for Lacanian theory still needs to be weighed. In a moment of candor, Lacan asks:

Where is the subject [...]? In radical, real individuality? [...]. In the organism [...] drawn in by the effects of the *ça parle*, by the fact that one living being among others has been called upon to become what Mr. Heidegger calls the “shepherd of being,” having been taken up into the mechanisms of the signifier? Is it, at the other extreme, identifiable with the very play of the signifier? Is the subject only the subject of discourse, in some way torn out of its vital immanence, condemned to soar over it, to live in this sort of mirage [...] making it the case that everything s/he lives is not only spoken, but, in living it, s/he lives it by speaking it, and that already what s/he lives is inscribed in an *epos*, a saga woven throughout the length of his or her very act? Our effort this year, if it has a meaning, is to show, precisely, how the function of the subject, playing between the two, is articulated elsewhere than in one or the other of these poles. [...]. Does it suffice to know that the function of the subject is in the between-the-two, between the idealizing effects of the signifying function and this vital immanence which you will readily confuse again, I think, despite my warnings, with the function of the drive? What we are engaged in, precisely, and what we are trying to push further, is precisely this. (IX, 12/20/61)

The idea that the subject is identical to the play of signifiers, or to language, is flatly rejected here. Instead, the subject is portrayed as something articulated between two poles. One of the poles is language, while the other pole remains a bit vague. Lacan tells us not to confuse this second pole with the drive. But what is it? Is it the organism? Vital immanence (whatever that is)? Radical, real individuality?

#### THE SUBJECT BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND THE REAL

I would like to discuss briefly what Lacan had in mind with this second pole, since it plays an important part in my argument that Lacan's theory of the subject is not reducible to language and is even in some sense external to language. It will turn out that the subject is produced not only by an interaction of signifiers but by an interaction of signifiers

with something nonlinguistic. Although the subject is not identical to either of the poles Lacan considers here, each pole designates something that is involved in the production of a subject—and language alone does not suffice.

Lacan's theory of the subject, then, can be presented in terms of two theses modeled on what is at stake in these two poles. One thesis is found relatively early in Lacan's work: the subject is a product or an effect of signifiers. This is what could be called the "linguistic" or "structuralist" thesis, and it is most clearly stated by the time of Lacan's ninth seminar: "The subject is the consequence of the fact that there is a signifier" (IX, 5/2/62). According to the second thesis on the subject, however, the production of the subject by signifiers needs to be complemented with an appreciation of a particular type of obstacle to signification. While Lacan in his ninth seminar used the terms *vital immanence*, *radical, real individuality*, and *the organism* to characterize this other, apparently nonlinguistic, pole of the subject, it would not be erroneous to understand this second pole in terms of sexuality, although I will not make this case until chapter 4. Let me point out that this does not violate Lacan's warning not to confuse the second pole with the drive, since the drives and the kind of sexuality I will describe are not the same thing.

Let us consider again what Lacan was up to in that passage. In a rare moment, he was trying to give a clear picture of his theory of the subject. The subject is not language, he says. It is not identical to the "play of signifiers." Then he considers whether the subject is biological. The answer, again, is no: the subject is not the organism, the real individual, or vital immanence. Is Lacan saying that a subject is between language and the body? The problem with this way of putting things is that it becomes clear later on in Lacan's work that the body is not really a suitable candidate for what he was trying to get at with this other pole either. In his fourteenth seminar, Lacan argues that the Other is the body: "The body itself is originally this site of the Other, insofar as it is there that the mark, as a signifier, is originally inscribed" (XIV, 5/30/67). As Bruce Fink puts it, the body, according to Lacan's conception of it, is always "overwritten" and "overridden" by language (1995a, 12). So "body" for Lacan is always a body that has already gone through language. One way to get at this second pole, nevertheless, is to consider the idea that there is something of the body that does not fit with the "socialized" body, the body that is overwritten with signifiers. Saying that a body is overwritten with signifiers suggests that there is something prior to signifiers on which the writing occurs, something that gets besieged by signifiers at some moment of its

existence. This could be thought of as a body prior to the body that is linguistically and socially carved up, thus a body that is presymbolic and perhaps to be thought of in terms of what Lacan called the real. In *Beyond Gender*, Paul Verhaeghe considers the body in Lacan's work from this point of view, arguing that

as long as Lacan was emphasizing the determining influence of the symbolic order, the body was thought of as a mere effect, that is, as a signified body, an imaginarised body. Indeed, we have a body as an effect of language and the distance created by this language. Once Lacan takes the Real seriously, another body enters into play, one for which the signifier "body" isn't even really appropriate. If the Real is our starting-point, it is not the body that is operative, but the organism, or organs. (2001, 79, emphasis in original)

Verhaeghe suggests speaking of the organism instead of the body when thinking about what I want to say is at stake in that second pole Lacan mentioned. But whatever term is settled upon, the category under which this organism or body is to be thought is the real, and not the symbolic.

But does the real always mean the presymbolic? The real is a much-contested term, and I would point out, with Fink and others, that there are two versions of the real in Lacan's work. There is a first real ( $real_1$ ), prior to the acquisition of language, which is "*progressively symbolized* in the course of a child's life," and there is another "second-order" real ( $real_2$ ), which is an effect of the symbolic order itself (Fink 1995a, 26–27, emphasis in original).  $Real_1$  sounds like a typically "realist" notion: the real consists of stuff "out there" that language tries to symbolize.  $Real_2$ , however, is not outside the symbolic, as  $real_1$  seems to be. This second-order real "is characterized by impasses and impossibilities" that occur in the symbolic order itself (1995a, 27). In what I think is his best definition of this understanding of the real, Lacan said that "the real can only be inscribed on the basis of an impasse of formalization" (XX, 93). Instead of being a field of referents that language aims at, this version of the real is a stumbling block in the field of signification itself.

Which notion of the real applies to the second pole of the subject as Lacan considered it in his ninth seminar? It is not clear. If the second pole is meant to be nonlinguistic and prior to symbolization, then would it have to be thought of in terms of the presymbolic  $real_1$ ? Lacan gave no indication that the subject's second pole entails a resistance to signification (except, perhaps, by the fact that he himself had a hard time settling on a good name for it!), and he did consider the possibility

that the subject is something “condemned to soar over” its own vital immanence—its ineffable, presumably prelinguistic body. This would suggest that this second pole is prior to signification, thus making it into something that would fit under the category of  $real_1$ . But it should be recalled that Lacan only entertained this possibility when he was considering the subject to be identifiable with language. If the subject were identical to language, then Lacan’s view was that it would indeed be condemned to soar over its vital immanence. This vital immanence would be radically excluded from the order of language, and thus from the subject, making it into something like a  $real_1$ . But Lacan rejects this idea, and so there is an entirely different implication.

If the subject is not to be identified with language, then the subject can also not be seen as something that simply “soars over” some ineffable vital immanence. In other words, if the subject is not identical to language, then this second pole also cannot be seen as something totally excluded from both the order of signification and the subject’s structure itself. On the contrary, a subject who is not identical to language would dwell in a domain constituted by remnants of this real pole, which is present in language without fully fitting into it. This pole—whether it is thought of as the body, the real, the organism, or vital immanence—is a factor for a subject then, insofar as it has effects upon and within language, so we can already see that “subject” in Lacan’s theory names neither what is going on in language itself nor what is going on in the biological individual but the effects of the latter on the former and the former on the latter. All of this is very well summarized by saying that the subject is between the two poles.

But why should this strange effect between two poles still be given the name “subject”? There has been a consensus for some time now that the classical theory of the subject—which Borch-Jacobsen characterized as “representationalist”—is inadequate. Such a view of the subject grants too much power to it and fails to take into account the subject’s own constitution by and subjection to its world, language, and culture. Methodologically, what Lacan does with the term *subject* in his work is not unlike what Derrida calls a “paleonymy”—the preservation (for strategic purposes) of an old, metaphysical name. But can a deconstructive paleonymy be done with a term such as subject? Derrida’s answer is ambiguous, while Lacan’s is not.

#### DERRIDA ON THE SUBJECT

In his discussion of paleonymy from the collection of interviews published in *Positions*, Derrida speaks of it as a “strategic necessity that

requires the occasional maintenance of an old name in order to launch a new concept" (1981, 71). He explains further:

Taking into account the fact that a name does not name the punctual simplicity of a concept, but rather a system of predicates defining a concept, a conceptual structure *centered* on a given predicate, we proceed: (1) to the extraction of a reduced predicative trait that is held in reserve, limited in a given conceptual structure (limited for motivations and relations of force to be analyzed), *named X*; (2) to the delimitation, the grafting and regulated extension of the extracted predicate, the name *being maintained as a kind of lever of intervention* in order to maintain a grasp on the previous organization, which is to be effectively transformed. (1981, 71, emphasis in original)

A paleonymy proceeds by continuing to use an old, traditional name while making the name different from what it always was, because one or more of the predicates associated with that name is being rethought and reworked. The technique of paleonymy should not be confused with another operation of deconstructive strategy, which consists of showing how a term that was thought to be inessential or only supplementary is actually central for the functioning of a system and at the same time disrupts the closure of the system in question. Deconstructive strategy is usually thought to consist of taking a weak, dispensable, or regrettable term in a metaphysical system—writing over voice, difference over identity, and so on—and demonstrating this term's secret necessity for the system, in order to bring about disruptions and to highlight the chronic instability of the system. What makes paleonymy a slightly different operation, even though from the earlier passage it is clear that it contains this aspect of deconstruction within it, is the fact that it can, in principle, involve using a strong or dominant concept from the philosophical, metaphysical tradition, changing its attributes with an eye to abandoning the concept altogether someday. The concept in question would always be in scare quotes.

Lacan's theory of the subject is taking a central philosophical and metaphysical concept and trying to understand it differently, without hoping for a better, more appropriate name for it. As a result, from Derrida's perspective, Lacan runs the risk of simply repeating what was metaphysical about the subject. This is precisely the point of the critiques of Lacan's theory that I have been considering in this chapter, according to which Lacan's subversion of the subject was also too much of a preservation of the (classical, representationalist) subject. A

deconstructive paleonymy does not set out to preserve an old name: it uses the name out of grim necessity and acts as if there is something about the name itself that will always be suspect. This is what I think can be called into question: Is it really necessary to await or invent a new name?

Derrida doubts the feasibility and desirability of reworking the concept of the subject at all. Consider the following passage, in which Derrida is discussing his concept of writing:

Constituting and dislocating it at the same time, writing is other than the subject, in whatever sense the latter is understood. Writing can never be thought under the category of the subject: however it [the subject] is modified, however it is endowed with consciousness or unconsciousness, it will refer, by the entire thread of its history, to the substantiality of a presence unperturbed by accidents, or to the identity of the self-same in the presence of self-relationship. (1976, 68–69)

The history of the subject poisons it. No matter how one modifies the subject, it will persist in being what it has always been: “by the entire thread of its history.” This suggests that as far as Derrida is concerned, a reworking of the concept of the subject would be if not impossible, at least foolhardy and useless. The subject cannot be reworked, it cannot be opened up and extended outside of the metaphysical system it is part of, because the subject is always understood as substance, self-presence, and so on. The history of the concept saturates it. This suggests, oddly, that the meaning of the subject is once and for all fixed, that there is a meaning for it that persists, no matter how much the concept of the subject is reworked. Is there a peculiar Derridean essentialism when it comes to the question of the subject?

Derrida seems to be deciding *a priori* that a future extension or transformation of the concept is doomed to failure because the history of the concept is so corrupting. If Derrida is excluding the possibility of any fruitful extension of the concept “subject,” then this can only be read as a foreclosing of a possible opening of the concept. It is striking that someone who has taught all of us about the essential dissemination of meaning at the same time speaks of the subject always meaning x, y, and z. Whatever meanings attach to the concept of the subject are maintained only by means of signifying practices which, as Derrida himself should argue, I believe, are always open to interruption and can always be altered.

In an interview with Jean-Luc Nancy in *Who Comes After the Subject?*, Derrida ultimately grants that it may be possible to rework

the concept of the subject in a useful way, but he continues to be suspicious of the desire to keep the name "subject." The following is a fairly representative quote for his position in this interview: "I would keep the name [subject] provisionally as an index for the discussion, but I don't see the necessity of keeping the word 'subject' at any price, especially if the context and conventions of discourse risk re-introducing precisely what is in question" (1991, 99). The provisional preservation of the name "subject" indicates that such a use might qualify as paleonymic, but once again it is the term itself that seems to threaten a return to what was metaphysical about the subject.

Furthermore, we see in this passage that Derrida finds an insistence on keeping the name "subject" strange. Indeed, why would one insist on keeping an old, suspicious name when something better might come along? Derrida is right, I believe, to question such an insistence. If Derrida is saying this out of disagreement with philosophers who would say that abandoning the concept of the subject is tantamount to some kind of nihilism or antihumanism, then I follow him. But is the only alternative to be eternally suspicious about the name? By continuing to think about the subject, and by continuing to use the name, Lacan adopted a different strategy, at the same time suggesting that the hope for a more innocent name may be just as strange as an insistence on keeping an old name.

Lacan's method supposes that it is not impossible to make something else be understood by an old name. In a certain sense, this results in making a new name of the old name anyway. So instead of a bizarre insistence on keeping the name "subject" at any cost, and also instead of an equally bizarre insistence that the name "subject" will always be dirty, and that we should therefore keep our eyes open for a better, more innocent name, there is the more optimistic and perhaps more cavalier Lacanian path. Lacan once said that he could make any word mean anything he wanted, as long as he kept talking about it long enough. On a more general level, though, this is precisely how the meanings of words actually change: by means of ongoing signifying practices. This also demonstrates something about the theory of freedom that can be found hidden in Lacan's theory. Freedom, from this perspective, is intimately bound up with something like the invention and repetition of new signifiers. In chapter 6 and the later chapters, the effects of such an invention will be studied in detail.